



NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL-INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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**Remarks Prepared for
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for the
Women in Defense National Conference
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Surviving and Thriving in Uncertain Times

I am especially honored to be here today. I would like to thank President Karen Conti for her kind introduction. First, congratulations on your 35th Anniversary! Since 1979, Women in Defense has advanced the cause of women in every area of national security—defense, intelligence, and homeland. This organization has made a major difference in promoting the personal growth and career development of thousands of women in our community.

The role of women in the defense establishment has experienced many remarkable changes since your organization began: Women have taken on virtually every role in the services, including distinguished service and sacrifice in combat. Women have risen to the highest ranks in all of the Services. Many thousands more have thrived in the officer corps. Women have risen to the highest civilian positions within the Department of Defense.

The Director of NGA Letitia Long—among many others—has achieved the highest levels of responsibility in the Intelligence Community. And look around this audience! Women have risen to the highest levels in the defense industry. Everyone here is a fine example of the progress we have made. Perhaps most important, we have reached a point where it is now “normal” for women to hold command, management, and senior positions across the defense establishment. We have made great progress, and we will continue to make even more progress in the next 35 years! And I am certain Women in Defense will remain our strong and effective advocate!

Celebrating your 35th Anniversary is especially appropriate during March - Women’s History Month. The theme for the 2014 National Women’s History Month is Celebrating Women of Character, Courage, and Commitment. This national theme of character, courage, and commitment shows exactly how women in defense today live up to the theme of this conference: Surviving and Thriving in Uncertain Times.

These themes also reflect how the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency—NGA—has thrived through the constant demands of two wars, rapidly evolving international



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threats, and severely constrained budgets. We serve two masters—the DNI and the DOD—as both an intelligence agency and a combat support agency with timely, accurate, relevant geospatial intelligence. Simply, everything has a time and a place on the earth—a geo-reference. Our job is understand the what, when, where, how, why, and what’s next about everything that affects national security.

NGA performs a more broad and diverse set of missions than other intelligence agency. Among our missions, we give unique insights to the President for world crises, we help the warfighter plan an operation, and we guide the first responder during a major disaster. During these challenging times, only the character, courage, and commitment of our people—especially our thousands of women employees, military, and contractors—have provided the strength that has allowed us to thrive in all of our missions. Yet, the same can be said for women throughout the history of this country.

From the American Revolution to the daunting global challenges we face today, women have helped defend this nation from our oppressors, break down gender and racial barriers, and defend us against enemies foreign and domestic. For much of our nation’s history, women were barred from most areas of service. But thanks to the character, courage, and commitment—and tireless sacrifice—of millions of women, we now not only participate, but lead the defense of our nation.

Consider the story of one of this year’s National Women’s History Month honorees—Tammy Duckworth, Member of Congress and Iraq War Veteran. In 2004, she was deployed to Iraq as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot. She was one of the first Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom until her helicopter was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) on November 12, 2004. She lost both her legs and partial use of her right arm in the explosion and was subsequently awarded a Purple Heart for her combat injuries. But she overcame her injuries and has become one of the strongest advocates for improving veteran’s services. She is a former Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In 2014, she became the first disabled woman elected to serve in the House of Representatives as a U.S. Representative from Illinois. That truly is surviving and thriving in uncertain times with character, courage, and commitment!

All women in defense—women in the military, in the government, and in industry--continue to be called on to follow Representative Duckworth’s example. We are called on to overcome all barriers, to defy all expectations, and to serve this nation.

As First Lady Michelle Obama told a Champions of Change event honoring women veterans: “You’ve been on the front lines, often in the line of fire. And generation after generation, women like you have proven that you not only serve alongside men—you lead them as well. Whether you’re in combat or aboard a submarine or anywhere else service takes you, you’re doing the job, and you’re doing it with grace, dignity, and poise.”



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Answering this call to service with character, courage, and commitment is exactly what this organization has exemplified for the past 35 years. And that is exactly what women in our community have always done. And in doing so, we have not only survived but we also have thrived during uncertain times.

Today, I want to encourage each of you personally and this organization as a group to seize three opportunities to thrive with character, courage, and commitment: Support women veterans, redouble your efforts to encourage women of all ages to step up to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) careers, and above all, be brave! Step up to take your rightful place in your organizations, and lead other women to follow you.

First, more than ever before, women veterans need our support. According to the Pew Research Center, since the all-volunteer force began more than 40 years ago, the percentage of women in the armed forces has more than quadrupled (to about 15 percent). Today, women are the fastest growing segment of the veteran population.

As the Afghan war winds down and the recently announced cutbacks begin to bite, women veterans need education and jobs as well as support for their unique issues. As Tammy Duckworth's story shows so well, women on the front lines around the world have been wounded and died by the dozens. Thousands more have returned home with the same problems facing the men, such as amputations and post-traumatic stress, as well as unique issues of family and health. As women in the defense community, we owe our sister veterans our support, and at NGA, we are fulfilling our commitment to them.

At NGA, we employ hundreds of women veterans. They serve in many "non-traditional" professions—from police officers to project scientists to photogrammetric analysts. We also have an active Wounded Warrior internship program that actively seeks to aid wounded women veterans. And we want to hire more veterans for several reasons that directly address the second opportunity—closing the STEM career gap.

STEM careers are critical to NGA's future success. As we transform geospatial intelligence, we are creating numerous new careers that women can—and will—fill admirably. To name just a few, Advanced Visualization Specialists, Multimedia Specialists, Computer Scientists, and Imagery Scientists. Those are in addition to our need for many kinds of geospatial analysts, certified program managers, and more. As you know, the current generation, largely men hired in the 1980s of course, is beginning to retire. We need to replace them with the best, most diverse brains available, regardless of race, creed, gender, or physical impairment.

NGA has a strong commitment to closing the gap in STEM careers. As you may know, our Director, Letitia Long, has two degrees in engineering—a bachelor's in electrical



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engineering from Virginia Tech and a master's in mechanical engineering from Catholic University.

Her own story is remarkable. She has risen from a college research intern with the David Taylor Naval Research Laboratory to become the first woman Director of a major intelligence agency. She is a role model for every woman in the community, and she has a strong personal commitment to encouraging women in STEM careers. So, we are eagerly hunting for diverse talent among veterans, the disabled, and historically black colleges and universities. Remember that we must encourage not just young women students, but especially women veterans and women returning to the workforce as they raise their families. Remember, too, that it wasn't very long ago that women were discouraged and even ostracized from pursuing careers in anything having to do with science, technology, or analysis.

We have made good strides in recent decades in seeing more and more women choose STEM careers. However, the facts show that the number of women in STEM fields is still very low. A 2011 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce found that while women make up 48 percent of the U.S. workforce, they hold less than 25 percent of STEM jobs. In fact, women with STEM degrees are less likely than their male counterparts to work in STEM occupations.

However, there is every reason more women should pursue STEM degrees and build long, successful careers degrees in STEM occupations. When you think about it, women are a natural fit for STEM jobs and studies because we are born multi-taskers and problem solvers.

Of direct benefit to women, STEM careers tend to pay more, offer more chances for advancement, provide more engaging work, and make more serious contributions to the national defense than the average job.

Yet, women often fail to believe in their ability to succeed not only in STEM professions but also in management and senior executive positions. We often sell ourselves short. That must stop! My third opportunity can help overcome that shortcoming. Simply, Be Brave! That is my philosophy when it comes to my career and my life. Being brave and taking calculated risks is the only way you earn rewards.

I went from writing stories as a junior reporter to overseeing the daily operations of an intelligence agency because I was willing to take some risks and be brave. In my own career, as a young woman, I worked at several traditional jobs for a number of years. Then I became a news reporter. These jobs helped me build my character and gain confidence. Too many times today I see younger workers afraid to do even those types of jobs to start their journey. While I worked as a reporter, my editor encouraged me to try working in the intelligence community. To go from being a reporter to starting a



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career in the IC required me to be brave and take a chance. But I made a decision to leave my comfort zone. I began as a technical research analyst at the Institute for Defense Analysis. Since then, I have worked across the community in seven positions of increasing responsibility.

I have worked for the Office of Naval Intelligence, Atlantic Fleet, the former US Joint Forces Command, the US Coast Guard, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, and the Intelligence and National Security Alliance. I am thankful I decided to be brave because I am now Chief Operating Officer for NGA. It has been quite a ride for me. It has been fun. I have enjoyed what I have done. I believe I have made a positive difference everywhere I have worked. But I am just one small example of the path followed by hundreds of thousands of women across the defense community.

Among these, we now find many thousands of role models. In fact, all of you here are those role models. All of you here have been brave. All of you here have shown the character, courage, and commitment to make a critical difference wherever you have worked. It is time for us to be brave in a different way. It is time for us to pay forward what we have gained. It is time for us to mentor other women, to challenge them to step out of their comfort zones. It is time for us to embolden our protégés to take stretch assignments, to pursue that promotion, and to reach for something better than they think they deserve.

Like us, they can—and will—earn their seat at the table by working hard—and smart—and delivering positive results. In fact, every time one of us has stepped up in the past, all of us have benefitted. Every time one of us acts bravely now, all of us benefit. And every time one of us is willing to take the next step forward, all of us will benefit.

In conclusion, all women will benefit from the individual and collective character, courage, and commitment that we show every day. Being brave is the best way—perhaps the only honest way—to not only survive but thrive in these difficult times. But let us remember that our challenges are small compared to those faced by the millions of women around the world who have suffered—and continue to suffer—oppression, poverty, and terror.

Despite all the troubles that women have faced through the generations and all we will face in the future, we have made great strides forward. By standing together, by paying forward, and by leading the next generation, we will continue to thrive. I would like to end by reminding you of the character, courage, and commitment of Tammy Duckworth. She has overcome serious injury, permanent disability, and discrimination to be the voice for all veterans in the halls of power.



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All of us here today can follow her sterling example. All of us here today have the character, courage, and commitment to survive every challenge and thrive!

Thank you. Now I would be pleased to take a few questions.

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